

Watch Out for Scam Artists Posing as Arborists

After a storm, it is common for people claiming to be tree specialists to show up at your door offering their services to remove or repair trees. In the words of one city forester: “They seem to come out of the woodwork-people we have never even heard of before.”

Unfortunately, many such individuals have little or no training, and sometimes have little interest in removing anything but money from the pocketbooks of unsuspecting residents.

The National Arbor Day Foundation urges you to not be a victim. “Make sure you are dealing with a reputable individual or tree care firm when you contemplate repairs or removal of any trees on your property,” warns John Rosenow, president of The National Arbor Day Foundation. “Legitimate arborists rarely go door to door to solicit business.”

Here are eight guidelines to help you find qualified tree-care specialists:

1. Make sure they are part of an established business in the community or nearby area, with a listing in the phone book, usually under Tree Service.
2. Have them provide you with evidence that they are actually working for the company, rather than moonlighting.
3. Ask for current certificates of insurance showing that they are fully insured for property damage, personal liability, and worker compensation.
4. Ideally, they should be members of a professional association of arborists such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), the National Arborist Association (NAA), or the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA).
5. Arborists who have received certification from their professional associations, such as ISA Certified Arborists, will have received training and access to current technical information on tree care, repair, and removal.
6. If possible, get more than one estimate to ensure that the price offered is competitive with that offered by others for the same services.
7. In case of tree removals, have a clear understanding about who removes the limbs and debris from the property, and whether or not the price includes stump removal and clean up.
8. Check to see if the estimate has considered the possible value your tree will have as firewood or chips, either to yourself or if sold to others.

“Above all, don’t be pressured into making a decision,” Rosenow warns. “Taking the time to select a qualified tree professional can safeguard your trees and save you from the long-term consequences of wrong decisions about what to do about them after a storm.”

Special note for victims of large-scale disasters.

During large-scale disasters — such as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in August, 2005 — many arborists from around the country may travel to help aid in recovery from widespread,

catastrophic damage. In these special cases, it may not be practical to use a local professional. In addition, professional arborists may very well be knocking on doors as they participate in coordinated efforts to canvas large areas.

Ask for proof of insurance. The insurance certificate will list a company name that you can call directly for verification.

Number eight may not apply. There may be so many trees to remove that the value of trees for firewood or chips may be drastically reduced.